

# T H E L O U N G E R.

[ N<sup>o</sup> XXXI. ]

Saturday, Sept. 3. 1785.

*Rura mihi et rigui placeant in vallibus amnes.*

VIRG.

ONE of the most natural and purest pleasures arising from the effect of external objects on the mind, is the enjoyment of rural prospects and rural scenery. The ideas of health, contentment, peace, and innocence, are so interwoven with those of the country, that their connection has become proverbial; and the pleasures arising from it are not only celebrated by those who have experienced their sweets, but they are frequently supposed by thousands to whom they never were known, and described by many by whom they have long been forgotten.

Of them, as of every other enjoyment, the value is enhanced by vicissitude; and long exclusion is one great ingredient in the delight of their attainment. Few have been so unfortunate as to have an opportunity of forming a full idea of that pleasure which a great state criminal is said to have felt, when on being taken from his dungeon, he saw the light and breathed the open air, though but for that short space which conducted him to his scaffold. But it may in some measure be conceived from the satisfaction which most men have at times experienced in changing the smoky atmosphere and close corrupted vapour of a crowded town, for the pure elastic breeze of a furze hill, or the balmy perfume of a bean-field.

With such increased enjoyment do I now feel the pleasures of the country, after being, as Milton says, "long in populous city pent." A very pressing invitation of my friend *Colonel Caustic* prevailed over that indolence, which was always a part of my constitution, and which I feel advanced life no wise tend to diminish; having one day missed half a dozen acquaintance, one after another, who I was informed had gone into the country, I came home in the evening, found a second letter from the Colonel, urging my visit, read part of Virgil's second Georgic, looked from my highest window on the sun just about to set amidst the golden clouds of a beautiful western sky, and coming down stairs, ordered my man to pack up my portmanteau, and next morning set out for my friend's country seat, whence I now address my readers.

To me, who am accustomed to be idle without being vacant, whose thoughts are rather wandering than busy, and whose fancy rather various than vivid, the soft and modest painting of Nature in this beautiful retirement of my friend's, is particularly suited. Here where I am seated at this moment, in a little shaded arbour with a sloping lawn in front, covered with some sheep that are resting in the noon-day heat, with their lambkins around them; with a grove of pines on the right hand, through which a scarcely stirring breeze is heard faintly to whisper; with a brook on the left, to the gurgle of which the willows on its side seem to listen in silence; this landscape with a back ground of distant hills, on which one can discover the smoke of the shepherd's fire, rising in large lazy volumes to a thinly-fleckered sky; all this forms a scene peaceful though enlivened, oblivious of care yet rich in thought, which soothes my indolence with a congenial

H h

quiet,

quiet, yet dignifies it with the swellings of enthusiasm, and the dreams of imagination.

On this subject of the enjoyment of rural contemplation, I was much pleased with some reflections lately sent me by a correspondent, who subscribes himself *Eubulus*. "It is the great error of mankind," says he, "that in the pursuit of happiness, they commonly seek for it in violent gratifications, in pleasures which are too intense in their degree to be of long duration, and of which even the frequent repetition blunts the capacity of enjoyment. There is no lesson more useful to mankind than that which teaches them, that the most rational happiness is averse to all turbulent emotions; that it is serene and moderate in its nature; that its ingredients are neither costly in the acquisition, nor difficult in the attainment, but present themselves almost voluntarily to a well-ordered mind, and are open to every rank and condition of life, where absolute indigence is excluded."

"The intellectual pleasures have this peculiar and superlative advantage over those that are merely sensual, that the most delightful of the former require no appropriation of their objects in order to their enjoyment. The contemplative man, who is an admirer of the beauties of nature, has an *ideal property* in all its objects. He enjoys the hill, the vale, the stream, the wood, the garden, with a pleasure more exquisite, because more unallayed, than that of their actual possessor. To him each enjoyment is heightened by the sense of that unremitting bounty which furnishes it; nor is he disquieted by the anxiety of maintaining a possession of which he cannot be deprived. How truly may he exclaim with the poet!

"I care not, Fortune, what you me deny:  
 "You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace;  
 "You cannot shut the windows of the sky,  
 "Through which Aurora shews her brightening face;  
 "You cannot bar my constant feet to trace  
 "The woods and lawns, by living stream, at eve:  
 "Let health my nerves and finer fibres brace;  
 "Of Fancy, Reason, Virtue, nought can me bereave\*.

"To a mind of that happy conformation which the poet here describes, the sources of pleasure are infinite. Nature is not less delightful in her general impressions, than when surveyed in detail; and to the former of these the verses above quoted seem chiefly to refer. It is certain that we experience a high degree of pleasure in certain emotions, excited by the general contemplation of Nature, when the attention does not dwell minutely upon any of the objects that surround us. Sympathy, the most powerful principle in the human composition, has a strong effect in constituting the pleasure here alluded to. The stillness of the country, and the tranquillity of its scenes, has a sensible effect in calming the disorder of the passions, and inducing a temporary serenity of mind. By the same sympathy, the milder passions are excited, while the turbulent are laid asleep. That man must be of a hardened frame indeed, who can hear unmoved the song of the feathered tribes, when Spring calls forth "all Nature's harmony," or who can behold, without a corresponding emotion of joy and of gratitude, the sprightliness of the young race of animals wantoning in the exercise of their new

\* Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*.

"powers,

"powers, and invigorated by the benignity of the air, and the luxuriance of their pastures."

My landlord Colonel Caustic, though I will venture to say for him, that he is neither without the sensibility of mind, nor the emotions of pious gratitude, which my correspondent justly supposes the contemplation of the rural scene to excite, yet surveys it not with feelings of quite so placid a sort as in some other minds it will be apt to produce. Here, as every where else, he stamps on the surrounding objects somewhat of the particular impression of his character. That sentiment, which, like the genius of Socrates, perpetually attends him, the child of virtue and of philanthropy, nursed by spleen, though here it puts on a certain tenderness which it has not in town, and is rather disposed to complain than to censure, yet walks with him, not unemployed, through his woods and his fields, and throws on the finest of their beauties a tint of its own colouring, as the glass of the little instrument called a *Claude Loraine*, dims the landscape which is viewed through it.

I have not been able to convince him that the weather is not very much changed from what it was in his younger days, and he quotes many observations in support of the milder temperature of the air in those long past seasons. But his sister (a very respectable maiden lady, a few years younger than the Colonel, who keeps house for him) insists on the difference in stronger terms, and is surprised at my unbelief, even though it is backed by the register. Of her faith in this article she shews the sincerity, by her practice in household-matters, having, as she tells me, for these fifteen or sixteen years past, taken out the greens from the fire-places at least a fortnight earlier than formerly, and not uncarpeting the rooms, nor taking down the window-curtains, till near a month later than she was wont to do.

On the appearance of his own fields the Colonel does not say quite so much, the culture he has bestowed on them counteracting in that particular the natural deterioration; but where-ever nature has been left to herself, her productions, according to him, have grown more scanty. When we start a hare, or flush a partridge in our walks, the Colonel always tells me there is not one for ten in his grounds that he used to see formerly; and he rather seemed to enjoy than condole with my want of sport, when I went yesterday a-fishing on the very same part of the river from which he informed me he was of old sure of catching a dish of trouts in an hour's time any day of the season. Nor was he quite well pleased with his man John's attempting to account for it, by his neighbour *Lord Grubwell's* having lately sent down a casting-net for the use of his gamekeeper.

On the subject of Lord Grubwell, however, in other matters, he is generally apt enough himself to expatiate. "This man," said he, "whose father acquired the fortune which afterwards procured the son his title, has started into the rank, without the manners or the taste of a gentleman. The want of the first would only be felt those two or three times in the year when one is obliged to meet with him; but the perversion of the latter, with a full purse to give it way, makes his neighbourhood a very unfortunate one. That rising ground on the left, which was formerly one of the finest green swells in the world, he has put yon vile Gothic tower on, as he calls it, and has planted half a dozen little carronades on the top of it, which it is a favourite amusement with him to fire on holidays and birth-days, or when some respected visitor drinks tea there." "That

"will



"will frighten your Dryads," said I, smiling. "It often frightens my sister," replied the Colonel; "and I am weak enough to let it fret me. I can bear the man's nonsense, when it is not heard two miles off. That ugly dry gap in the bank opposite, was the channel of a rill, of which he turned the course, to make a serpentine river for his Chinese bridge, which he had built, without knowing where to find water for it. And from the little hills behind he has rooted out all the natural fringe of their birch and oak shrub-wood, to cover their tops with stiff circular plantations. Then his temples and statues, with their white plaster and paint, meet one's eye in every corner. I have been fain to run up that hedge, to screen me from all those impertinencies, though it lost my favourite seat the best half of its prospect."

But Colonel Caustic has other wrongs from the innovations of his neighbour, which he suffers without telling them. Lord Grubwell's improvements often intrench on a feeling more tender than the Colonel's taste, though that is delicate enough. The scenes around him have those ties upon my friend which long acquaintance naturally gives them over a mind so susceptible as his. As the Mythology of the ancients animated all Nature, by giving a tutelary power to every wood and fountain, so he has peopled many of the objects in his view with the images of past events, of departed friends, of warm affections, of tender regrets; and he feels the change, or sometimes even the improvement, as a sacrilege that drives the deity from the place. This sentiment of memory is felt but very imperfectly in a town; in the country it retains all its force, and with Colonel Caustic it operates in the strongest manner possible. Here he withdraws himself from an age which he thinks is in its decline, and finds in the world of remembrance that warmth of friendship, that purity of manners, that refinement of breeding, that elegance of form, that dignity of deportment, which charmed his youth. This is perhaps one cause of his severity, when at any time he mixes with mankind; 'tis like leaving an enlightened company of friends, for the frivolous society of ordinary men, which often overcomes the temper of the best-natured people, and, if it does not sink them into sadness and silence, will generally make them "*humorous and peevish*."

Even the recollection of sufferings endears to such a mind as Caustic's the scene that recalls them. I observed, that where-ever our stroll began, it commonly ended in a *sombre* walk, that led through a grove of beeches to a little sequestered dell. Here I remarked one tree fenced round in such a manner as shewed a particular attention to its growth. I stopped as we passed, and looked on it with a face of inquiry. "That tree," said the Colonel, observing me, "is about forty years old."—He went on a few paces—"It was planted by a Lady,"—throwing his eye on the ground, and blushing, as I thought.—"It was planted"—He walked some steps farther; looked back, and sighed.—"She was then one of the finest women in the world!"

#### EDINBURGH:

Published by WILLIAM CREECH; by whom Communications from Correspondents are received.

Next Saturday will be published N<sup>o</sup> XXXII.